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M^r. Sheridan's Speech after his Examination before the late House of Commons, on Wednesday the 15th of December, 1680.

Is, I confess Sir, a great misfortune to fall under the displeasure of the Honourable House of Commons, it is a burden that no man, tho' never so great, is able to bear; It cannot then be a wonder, if so inconsiderable a Person, and of so little strength as I, should stoop under the weight; Nor that I fear any Danger to my Person, but grieve for the wounds it gives my Reputation, which I have always valued above my Life, and that it might be prefer'd spotless, I have ever made it my study to keep a good Conscience, void of Offence, towards God and towards Man, and therefore I little expected to be brought as a Criminal to this Bar, or any Tribunal.

But I am convinc'd, Innocence is no security against the Darts of Envy or Malice, and that he who will hazard his Body or his Soul, may take away the Life and Fane of any one at pleasure; 'tis to men of such principles I owe my present Trouble; I do not lay this to reflect upon any Member of this Great and Honourable Assembly. My Evil is from without Doors, and I know the Authors and the Contrivance so well, that, if it were convenient, I could name them, and trace the whole Chain, Link by Link, to the very first, hammer'd by prejudice, and particular Interest.

I do not wonder that, in the present circumstances, you shou'd have an ear open to all reports that any way relate to the publick, this is due to your Station, and to your Prudence; and because Justice and your Honour require it, I as little doubt your reserving the other ear for the Pleas and Defences of the Accus'd, or that you will condemn any man unheard. Upon this assurance it is, that I am bold to beg, with all due respect and reverence, that I may have liberty to speak for my self without interruption; If you are pleas'd to grant me this favour, I will use it as fully and briefly as I can, for your satisfaction and my own vindication.

I have been represented (I hope without offence I may say, traduc'd, for I do I can make it appear) for a person of no Fortune, a Papist, a second Calman, and what is more ridiculous, tho' not more false, a Jesuit, and the Duke's Confessor.

In clearing my self from these Aspersions, I must be forc'd to lay something which nothing but necessity, that either has none, or breaks all Laws, can excuse from vanity. As that I was born a Gentleman, of one of the antientest Families, and related to many Considerable, in Ireland; in one County there is a Castle, and a large Demeain, and in another a greater tract of Land for several Miles together, yet known by our Name. Lived not say who was the Head or chief, 'tis too much that my Grand-father was the last who enjoy'd the Estate, and that my Father left an Orphan in the beginning of King James's Reign soon, found him self dispossess'd and expos'd to the World, that whole County, with five others, being then all escheated to the Crown. My Parents Protestants, my Mother a Gentlewoman of England of good Fortune, a Foster, who for my Father's sake quitted her Country and her Relations, both fam'd for holiness, for their Loyalty and Sufferings in the late Rebellion, when my Father escap'd twice narrowly with his Life, and at last was forc'd to fly, for relieving and protecting both the Fortunes and Persons of very many English.

To my Birth I had a suitable Education; I have some slender pretence to Letters, I am not altogether a Stranger to the Civil-law, nor the Laws of England, the means intended for my Livelihood.

But, without my seeking or knowledge, some Friends procud'd for me the Collectorship of the Customs of Cork, and the management of most of the Inland Revenue of that County. This Employment, and the Accidents attending it, together with those of the late War, the Prizes, and others in the last War with Holland, put into Kindes charge me to bring for my own proportion of Advance-money, for the present Revenue of Ireland, 9000*l*. as appears upon Record in the Chancery of England; and being by a Brother or mine, then here, without my privity or desire, engag'd in this undertaking, and a stranger to all the Partnership, excepting one, (the last was 3 years I told my interest for 400*l*. profit. This Money I employ'd in Corporation and Church Leases, in Mortgages, and other securities, at 10*l*. per Cent, the Interest of that Kingdom, and after this account, if I have no visible real Estate, I hope no man can doubt but that I shall live independently. No besides I happen to be a younger Brother, so far from being a man of advantage, being deligh'd the Heir of two elder Brothers, have no Children. The Bills of Exchange drawn and paid by Sir John Bickerstaffe and Company, Mr. D. Gaffey and others, for his Master, and others known Merchants, will shew my proper food, and no man's Bounty supported my Expences, and therefore because I can with great truth, do the more freely declare, That I neither have, nor ever had any Relation to the Duke of Dutchess of York, as a Servant or Servient, a Salary-man, or Penitentiary, and was far from succeding Mr. Colman, that his Employment never enter'd into my thoughts taken up with Affairs of a far different nature. My Journey to France was no way criminal, and in a great measure the effect of curiositie, having before seen very little of that Country, and

Country, Holland, or Germany; and as I went not with the Duke, to my return in his Train was purely accident.

For my Religion, as I was born of Protestant Parents, so I was all along bred a member of the Church of England, and (by the Grace of God) will live and die in this Profession; for it is not so much owing to the chance of Education, as to my choice, being satisfy'd by Reason, by Scripture, and the Laws of my Country, no inconsiderable Argument, that of all, it is the most purely Christian.

Since I was seventeen years of Age I have gone daly to Church, and several times in every year receiv'd the Sacrament; I did so twice while in Flanders, as Dr. Lake and Dr. Dongby (the Duke's Chaplains) and others can witness; and I have done so six times since my return thence, there are in this Honourable House that can testifie some part of this Truth. I have taken the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy eleven times, am ready to submit to all further injunctions of Law in matters of Religion, have in Disputes encounter'd, tho' unwillingly, with many of the several Orders abroad, remain'd unshaken in my Principles; This at Ghent, putting a Jesuit (more zealous than the rest) into great passion, made him pronounce me obstinate, and declare, *He cou'd sooner bring over ten of the most rigid Paparicks of England, than hope to make me a Proselyte.* Now if all this be not sufficient to wipe off the imputation of Popery, I confess I am to seek for a defence.

Among others 'tis objected, That by my Interest in his R. H. I got my Brother made a Bishop; in opposition to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and contrary to Merit. To this I answer, That my Brother has been as much, and as injuriously, though not so publicly defam'd as I; that he came off with Honour; that a peal between two Great Lords of that Kingdom, and one of the greatest of this, did not only prevent his being sooner promoted, but was the occasion of his being bespatter'd with many falsehoods and calumnies; that few in Ireland deserve it better; that what he enjoys, he obtain'd not in opposition to, tho' without the recommendation of the chief Governour, nor by the mediation of the Duke, but of a great Minister, in the presence of my Lord Bishop of London, from the King's immediate Grace openly shewn in Council, and with a particular mark of His Royal Favour.

I hope 'tis no Crime to honour and revere the Duke as he is a Prince, or if a private man to love and value his innate Worth and Qualities; or to have said, as it is reported (I wish nothing else had been with less Truth) That I wou'd hazard my Life and Fortune to do him any lawful and just Service; If it be a Crime, as I can no ways apprehend of the Brother of my King, while publickly pray'd for in all the Churches of the three Kingdoms, I confess my self guilty; But I am not so wedded to his Interest, as to espouse or pursue them, if he can have any such, contrary to the Duty I owe, and ever will pay my Sovereign, my Country, my Religion and my God.

And I do here most solemnly protest, as I hope for Heaven, if I knew him in any instance a Conspirator or a Traitor, I wou'd not only detest, but endeavour to bring him to publick Justice; and if ever he can be prov'd a Criminal of this nature, I will have no more respect nor regard, but less, for him, than I wou'd for any common Offender. And therefore, without the hopes of reward, or the fears of punishment, I declare in the presence of the Almighty, If I knew any part of the Popish Plot, or the persons concern'd in't, I wou'd long since have reveal'd the whole Contrivance. But none in their senses can believe, that a known Protestant cou'd be made privy to such a Conspiracy; to which, if necessary, might be added, that I was in a Country remote from that, where the Design is said to be hatch'd.

I own my self of so extensive a Charity, to love the persons of all honest Men, notwithstanding their differing from me in opinion, about the Modes and Circumstances of Religion, and to be for Liberty of Conscience, when consistent with the safety of the state, to all quiet and peaceable Dissenters; But when 'tis urg'd and made use of to other ends, or as a Cloak for Rebellion or Treachery, I abominate all such Indulgence.

But I will no longer dwell on this Subject, than to mind you of Colonel Mansel's mistake or forgetfulness, when he informs this Honourable House, *That in or about July, 1678, I din'd at his Treat for a German Lord, in order to a Design of his upon a Foreign Command, and that 2 or 3 days after, I shew'd a advise him against it, telling him the Duke wou'd very soon have occasion for such Officers.* First, I do say, to have said so was no Crime; But I easily see through this Article, 'tis to serve as an argument, that I understand somewhat of the Plot, of which I am as ignorant as any man living, beyond what I have since learnt from the Prints and public Fame. In the next place, I do utterly deny I ever said the words, because I do not know the Duke had any such Design, and am certain I cannot invent. Besides, by many circumstances, needless here to mention, that Dinner was after the Courts return from Wadsworth, and consequently after the breaking forth of the Plot. I desire the Gentleman wou'd recollect himself; at that time he was very great and intimate with a Roman Catholick, H. A. from whom if he heard not the words, as I am not apt to imagine, I am confident he dream'd them. He cannot be ignorant that I know why he was disbandied in Ireland, &c. and that I always declin'd, not only as having no interest, but as unwilling for other reasons, to introduce him to the Duke, as he often prid'd; and therefore he made his application to others, but with as ill success.

And now give me leave, I beseech you, Mr. Speaker, to answer an Objection, that I have

have prescrib'd a way how the King shou'd live without Parliaments: I am so far from enter-taining such a thought, that I ever esteem'd the Constitutions of *England* by King, Lords and Commons the happiest kind of Government in the world; and if the discourse called, *The Rite and Power of Parliaments, &c.* be mine, of which my will have me the Author, the reading it, wou'd be of this a sufficient Confutation: In that Parliaments are magnifi'd, their power rather enlarrg'd than lessend, and their frequeat meetings recommended as most convenient.

In a word, whatever Character my Adversaries have given of me, I am not a Protestant in Masquerade, I can neither Lie nor Dissemble, I am really what I profess, and as the word is commonly taken, no lover of Arbitrary Government, in any single or complicated body.

As to the Letter Subscrib'd by *Fitz-James*, I do sincerely protest I have no Acquaintance with any of the Name, nor ever saw the Hand before, nor the intended Messenger C. who not finding me, left it with the Maid-servant: But in this there is nothing Criminal.

As to the Computations, they are a Transcript from a Paper of Sir *Peter Pett*, containing the number of Conformists, Non-Conformists and Papists throughout *England*, taken by the Bishops order, in, or about the time of the General Indulgence, and by him produc'd presently after the Plot, upon the talk that there were fifty thousand Papists, able to bear Arms, within *Temple-Bar* and about *Westminster*; a number near double to what, at the taking this survey, they were found men, women and children in the whole Kingdom.

For the Copy of my Cousin *Wilson's* Writing, I confess it the only thing I endeavour'd to evade, having ingenuously, and without reserve ansy'd all other questions. That individual Paper I never saw before the preceding night, when meeting it in the Drawer of my Bed-Chamber, (always open, whether I am at home or abroad) I laid it uppermot with purpose of Inquiring how he came by it, and whether he knew the Author; But not seeing him till next day in presence of the Members sent to search my Lodgings, I cou'd not ask him, and was surpriz'd to have so Indiscreet and Reflective a Paper found in his hand, and among mine. 'Tis true, that about three Weeks before, I found another of the same Contents, in an Old Crabb'd hand, to me unknown; which after I had Read, and concluded it might possibly be left by some of my Acquaintance in their Visits, and being unable to gues at the person, not knowing how long it had layn there, being Dated above a Month before, I immediatly threw it into the fire. Yet in this Paper, which has made so great a noise, there is neither Felony nor Treason, and being the Act of another, and never by me publish'd, having neither Sub, nor Supercription, nor Writ to, nor for from me, nor Copi'd by my Order, cannot, I presume, be a Libel, nor I hope imputed to me, to whom it came perfectly by Accident: If it were lawful to speak ones gueses from the Contents, it shou'd be to have come from a Learned Gentleman, one of your own Members, then in the Count Skill'd in the Spanish Tongue, to which both my Cousin and I are perfect strangers; nor was either of us out of London then, or for sometime before. If I cou'd as well hit upon the person, as his Quality, I wou'd give a more satisfactory account of this matter; and I hope this Honourable Assembly will the sooner Credit me, when they reflect, that upon seeing another Paper of my Kinsman's writing, I wou'd not by a lie deny this to be his hand.

As for my Writing to Mr. *Gaddesby*, I refer my self to the Letter in Sir *W. Waller's* hands: I have told you the accidental occasion, I desir'd from him, (whose Acquaintance I knew large, even among the Members of that Parliament) the most material of public News; I neither ask'd for Schemes or Figures, I have ever Laugh'd at the idle and ridiculous Art of Judicial Astrology, invented, at least practis'd, to impose upon, and Pick the Pockets of the ignorant and the Credulous.

And now as to the Cause of my Commitment: I story Dr. *B.* told me as News, of *Peter Norris* his knowing as much of the Plot as any man living, his going, or being gone to *France* to fetch a Priest to be a Witness, I can only say, as near as I remember, I gave the same account to Mr. *Secretary*, not as an informer, but as News; for not being took'd upon as such, I was not desir'd to Swear, nor cou'd I to a hear-say: In this I call Heaven to witness I had no Sinister design, but an honest intention of having the full Truth brought to Light: Nor do I know, nor have I any reason to believe, that Mr. *Secretary's* after proceedings were from any other principle. Upon my telling him the Name of *Norris*, and his saying he had never before heard it, and commanding me to send the Doctor to him, or the others Description, As soon as I met with the Doctor, which was several dayes after this Discourse, and he as not knowing Mr. *Secretary* refusing to go, I desir'd from him the Description, which sometime after he brought me; I gave or sent to Mr. *Secretary*, for I cannot tell whether. But of this I am certain, that all I knew of the Affair, was from the Doctor only; and that I never communicated it to any, but Mr. *Secretary*, and that by what I writ under the Description, appears to be near a Month after *Norris* his departure, and consequently cou'd not be design'd to stop his Journey, or prevent the Priest coming over, or obstruct the fuller discovery of the Plot, which man living defrauded more than myself, (out of which number I cannot be known) banish'd according to his, and as the Kingdome? And now I hope none

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of the Members of this Honourable House can imagine, I cou'd be guilty of so Horrid a Crime, as having any knowledge of the Priests being poison'd, as is suspected, or given out he might be. I am so ignorant of this, or any part of the Conspiracy, that I do not so much despise, as decline, because not needing it, the generous offer of Mr. Speaker, or other Members Intercession for my Pardon. I acknowledge, as I ought, the Favour with all fitting respect; but I thank God, I am so Innocent, that I dare, as now I do, challenge the whole world, to make out one particular, where in Word or Action, in the whole course of my life, I have done or spoken falsely, or unjustly, and yet no man ever suffer'd more Calumnies, without any cause, or the least shadow of Truth, beyond the witty malice of those, whose Eyes are blinded, and Consciences sear'd by Envy and Interest, who from pretended Friends are become my real Adversaries, contrary to Reason and Justice. But further, none can believe I cou'd keep any dangerous Correspondence, when its well known that for these three years and a half all my Letters were no otherwise Directed, than for me at the Royal Coffee-house.

Besides it appear'd at the Committee by *Norris* his own Papers, that this Priest *Dowdall*, (whose Name I never heard before), died September last was twelve Months, eight Months before I heard there was such a man in the world as *Norris*, and at a time when I was in another Country. And since you have thought fit to acquit Dr. D. who was my Author and Principal, and who own'd himself a *Roman Catholic*; I hope you will not think it equal, that I a known sincere Protestant, and but an Accessary, shou'd stand Committed, and Committed after such a manner, as neither Felon nor Traitor, not only Accus'd, but Convict'd, cou'd suffer a Closer Confinement.

And here, Mr. Speaker, I intreat your leave to ask Pardon, if at the Committee my behaviour has offend'd any of the Members of this Honourable House, and to say, whatever heat I express'd, was the effect of Passion, to which I was mov'd, by hearing several of them in publick, as at *Lockett's* and other Eating and Coffee-houses, had call'd me *Papist*, and a second *Coleman*, with other Abusions I cou'd not bear, without resentment. To this was add'd my being command'd a Messenger for Dr. D. an office beneath me, and wherein I cou'd not expect to be successful, not knowing whether he wou'd appear without Compulsion. I hope it will not be accounted an unexplicable Crime for a Gentleman of more Years and Discretion, than I can pretend to, to shew himself distinguisht as a conceiv'd Indignity or Affront, and in hopes it may not be accounted so hainous, I do once more withall due Submission beg pardon. There is one thing more I cannot without trouble touch upon, the Reflections the Writers Vouch very different from the Printed, bring upon my Reputation, in those it is said, it appears that I have succeeded Mr. *Coleman*, than which there never was a more groundless, false, or malicious invention. And also that I question'd your Authority, and said your Proceedings look'd like the late Rebellion. However Sir *William Robert* came to make the Report, my records were to Sir *John Merton* in another Room, and to him I repeat, whether they were not shus. Upon his advising that I shou'd fare the better, if I firs't shew'd my Papers, I told him I wou'd not bid one, nor dispute their power, so tho' I had heard others did, and that the Seizing Closets and Writings, was not only illegal, but look'd upon as one of the Causes of the last Rebellion; thereupon he wist I had not said the Words, I reply'd, I meant no harm by those Objections, and notwithstanding my mentioning them, they shou'd find in me a readiness to obey, and an entire submission; and added, if the were offensive, I implaid them, and asked his pardon, as I now humbly do from the whole House, if I am thought herein to have offend'd. And to do Sir *John Justice*, he was please'd to promise he wou'd take no notice of the Discourse; unless command'd; to whom with the rest of the Committee I refer my self, the author of my own acco't waz not going along with them when your Messenger, and I had been guilty of any Crime, I had not only Warning, but Threats and Advice to fly many days, some weeks before, when I was told by Letters from unknown hands, and by few real persons of Honour and Quality, that I was design'd to be brought into trouble; I need not tell this place, say for what it afores'. And here I cannot by the way but take notice of a Report made by *Jahde Walker* at the Bars, and for read at Coffee-houses, that he wou'd have search'd Mrs. *Sheriff's* Lodging, and there found only a Parcel of Papist Books, where as he never was in Mrs. *Sheriff's* House, an *John Merton's* House, or any other Books that could have been, and therefore I hope this was some Clerks mistake, or a misprint. Is it now seen no man can hope'd beyond the reach of Malice, and the services of the wicked, and that happen so to be brought hither and suffer'd Criminal, I am extremely pleased, that the good fortune to meet with so wise and equal Judges, as compose this August and Honourable Assembly, whereon I will not from these hands I do not doubt, but upon an exact Scrutiny, and an impartial Examination my having been so infinitely traduced, and so wrongfully exposed to the publick, will be so far from gratifying my Adversaries just deserts, that they will only be discredited, but say, selfe-glorious advancing a cause, therefore I pray, my Quaile at the Front-stool of your Judicature, and willingly submit to you, the Surety and Determination I have to give up my life to you, the noblest of your Countrymen, through your great worthiness, and your high Qualifications of the whole Matter, your speedy Condemnation or Acquittal, as I have no fond-folly, or Inexperience, but in blindness, b'cause I ignor'd of and in your judgments 10